

## Pastor's Note

Hello

What does it take to please God? There are some people who think the way you please God is through religious ritual. You do certain kinds of rituals and God's pleased and you're part of the in-crowd. But that's not true. There are others who think the way you please God is through rules and regulations. If you just do certain things, then God will say, "You're okay." That doesn't please God. Some people think if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, well, maybe God will grade on a curve and I'll be okay. That's not true either. There's only one way you can please God. Only one way. Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) says, "*Without faith, it is impossible to please God.*" The only way you can please God is by faith.

Now, the problem with that is a lot of people think they have faith, but they don't. They think they've got it, but they don't. So God says, "Hey, you need to examine yourself." 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV) "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.*" So this week we're going to look at how to know you've got the kind of faith that pleases God? How do you know you've got the kind of faith that gives you access into heaven? That's a pretty legitimate question. Fortunately, James tells us four things that faith is not and then he tells us what real faith is. Real faith is not just something you say. Real faith is not just something you feel. It's more than feelings. Real faith is not just something you think. It's not just some intellectual mind trip. Real faith is not just something you believe. It's more than just belief. The bible says, real faith, the kind that pleases God, is something you do. It's something that you do.

### **1. Real faith is not just something you say.**

James 2:14 (NIV) says, "*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such `faith' save him?*" James is not saying here that the person actually has faith, he's saying if a person claims to have faith. In other words, you talk a good line. You know all the right phrases. You've got the jargon down. You can speak Christianese. You can claim faith, but that doesn't necessarily mean you've got it. Gallup says there are fifty million people in America who say, "I'm a Christian." But not all of those fifty million can back it up with the lifestyle they live. And just because a person claims it, doesn't mean they have it. Typically we tend to label people, and if they vaguely sound Christian, we go, "Oh, they must be a believer." You know, after a great play in a big game an athlete points upward or in the post-game interview they say, "I just want to thank the

good Lord." Oh, they said "Lord," they must be a Christian. Not necessarily. A lot of celebrities have claimed faith and yet we see no change in their lifestyle.

The point is real faith is more than just talk. Not everyone who has a Christian bumper sticker on their car is a Christian. Have you figured that out? Let's face it, when you get flipped off a couple of times you figure out the guy's not a believer. He borrowed the car. Or maybe he bought it second-hand and couldn't scrape the fish symbol off. In

Matthew 7:21 (NLT) Jesus said, *"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter."* Not everyone who claims to be a believer really is. He says there's a big difference between being a professor and a possessor, between saying it and actually having it. Now what does God say? What value is this kind of faith, the kind that just claims it? He says there's no value at all. It's worthless. Talk is cheap. Because faith is more than just something you say.

## **2. Real faith is more than just something you feel.**

A lot of people confuse emotions and feelings with faith. They come to a church service and they are emotionally moved, they're inspired, and they're stimulated. They get a quiver in their liver and, you know, "Oh, man! I'm moved!" And maybe they even cried or felt God's presence. But just because you've felt God's presence doesn't mean you have real faith. There's a big difference between faith and feeling. Look at James 2:15-16 (NIV) *"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"* He's saying here faith is not just mere sentimentality. You go out on the street and you see some homeless person who's destitute. They're poor, they're hungry, they're cold, and they need clothing and shelter. You walk up to them and say, "Don't worry, be happy!" That's not faith. Sympathy says, "I'm sorry you hurt." That's sympathy. Empathy says, "I hurt with you." That's empathy. Compassion says, "I'll do something to help." Faith is compassionate.

How many times did Jesus say, or was it said about Him, He was moved with compassion for people. Faith is practical. It gets involved in people's hurts. And when you see a need, you do something about it. You don't just spout off and say, "Well, I'll pray for you." You do something about it. That's real faith. I John 3:17 (NLT) says, *"If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion, how can God's love be in that person?"* He's talking about other Christians there. If you're a Christian, you're a part of the family of

God. And when you became a believer, you became a part of this family. And as a result, you have some family responsibilities. If you're a real believer. What are those family responsibilities? You care about when other Christians are hurt, or in pain, or grieving, or in sorrow. He says faith is something you do. You don't just feel it. You have responsibilities.

Now you may say, "Well, I can't meet everybody's needs!" And you're right. You can't. But you can meet some. And it may not make a difference to everyone, but it makes a difference to those people. A little boy was out on the seashore and there were hundreds of starfish that had been stranded on the beach when the tide went out. He began to pick up these starfish and sail them back out into the ocean. A man came along and said, "What are you doing?" The boy said, "I'm putting the starfish back in the ocean." The man said, "Well, there's too many! You can't possibly make a difference! What difference does it make?" The little boy bent down and picked up another star fish and tossed it into the ocean and said, "I bet it made a difference to that one." One by one. Great opportunities to serve God seldom come, but small opportunities surround us every day. You need to look for those little opportunities because faith is not just something you say, and it's not just something you feel.

### **3. Real faith is not just something you think.**

Some people think of faith as a philosophical quest. It's something they want to discuss and debate and argue. They think about faith as a kind of mental stimulation. It's a concept to be debated, an idea to be discussed, or a principle to be contemplated. They don't make any decision on it, and they certainly don't make any commitment to it, they just think on it. They treat faith as a mental challenge. Now James imagines this kind of philosophical debater. In James 2:18 (NIV) he says, *"But someone will say, 'you have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."*

What's he talking about here? He says, "Well, here's this guy who says, "Hey! You're into faith. Hmmm. I'm into deeds." Different strokes for different folks. You're into that, I'm into this. Let's debate it. Let's talk about it. Let's discuss it. And James is making a point here. He says, faith is not something you debate. There's no way you can show your faith without doing something. Real faith is something you do. The key phrase here is, "show me." He says, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." Do you remember when you were a kid playing with your friends? How many times did you hear, "Prove it?"

He's saying here that real faith can only be expressed in visible ways, that you can actually see it. Faith is odorless, it's colorless, and it's

weightless. So how do you know when you've got it? How do you know if you've got the real kind of faith that pleases God? How do you know you've got the kind of faith that gets you into heaven? Well, the bible says look at your lifestyle. That's how you can know, it'll show up in your life. You'll not only know it, but you'll show it. You see, today, I think, in America there are many Christians that only God knows about for sure. You and I don't have any idea if they're a believer or not. There's absolutely no difference between them and everyone else. You see, faith is like calories. You can't see them, but you can sure see the results. And when a person really has Christ in their life, you can see it. And if you can't see it, you have every reason to doubt, "Do they have the real, legitimate stuff?"

There's a classic movie called, *The Invisible Man*. The only way you could tell if the invisible man was in the room, was if things were moving. There would be a teacup and saucer going across the room in thin air or you'd see this hat floating along with nothing underneath it. Or a door would slam. The only way you could tell the invisible man was there was by the actions. The effect that he had on the things around him. James is saying that's the way faith is. "Show me your faith without deeds, I'll show you my faith by what I do." If you claim to be a Christian, then anybody has the right to ask you to prove it by your lifestyle. Because what you believe is not as important as how you live. How you live; that's what you really believe. In America today, we have this gap between behavior and belief. And what we say we believe, we don't always back up with our lifestyle.

If you were to go door to door and ask, "What's important to you?" Nine out of ten people will say, "My family is the most important thing to me." So if you ask, "How much time do you spend with each child on a daily basis? Do you put their needs ahead of your job?" All of a sudden, you'll start seeing that even though they say it's important, it's not, as, important. Someone says, "My health is very important to me." "Great. Do you get enough sleep?" "No." "Do you exercise?" "No." "Do you watch what you eat?" "No." "Then it's not really that important to you, is it?" What they say and how they act don't correspond. How many people do you know that claim to be a Christian and yet their life doesn't correspond? Do they hang out with other Christians? You know, fellowship?" "Do they have a strong desire to go to church? Do you ever see them reading the Bible? Do you hear them pray on a regular basis? Do they tithe their income? Do they share their faith with others? Do they tell anyone about Christ?" "No." "Then how do you know they're a Christian?" "Well, they claim they are." Wrong!

Just because you think it, doesn't mean it's so. Faith is not something you think, it's not something you feel, it's not something you say. It's more than that. It'll show up in your life. If You're Saved and You Know It, Then Your Life Will Surely Show It. Right. If you were to stick your hand in a 220 volt socket and get connected to that power source, you would know it. And your body would show it. God is a far greater power source than that. And I don't think God can come into your life without it changing you. And when people say, "Oh, I have Christ in my life. I believe in Christ." And you say, "How are you different?" And they don't know any difference, you have every reason to doubt if they've got the real thing. Jesus Christ can't come into your life and not change you. Because He comes in and He starts rearranging the furniture.

All of a sudden, your values change. Things that used to be important are just cheap thrills now. You see through what's not real. And you've got a whole new set of values and all of a sudden, you're concerned about other people who are Christians and all of a sudden you're concerned about serving God, not just making money. And all of a sudden, you're concerned about things that are going to last for eternity; not just what's going to happen tomorrow. Your whole life starts taking on new meaning and new purpose and new significance and new value. And you'll know it and it will show it in your life. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Real faith is not just something you say, or feel, or think. Real faith always produces a changed life.

#### **4. Real faith is not just something you believe.**

A lot of people have strong beliefs about Jesus Christ, strong beliefs about God, and strong beliefs about the Bible. They went to catechism, they know the creed, they know the religion, and they've got the doctrine down, "I believe in this and that..." and all those kind of things. Oh, they have great beliefs! But that's not enough. And James points this out, he uses a little sarcasm here in James 2:19 (NIV) he says, "*You believe that there is one God. Good! But even the demons believe that; and shudder!*" He says, "Big deal! You're not doing anything different than Satan does." Satan believes in God, but you're not going to find him in heaven. Why? He hasn't made a commitment.

Psalm 14:1 (NIV) says, "*The fool says in his heart, there is no God.*" It's foolish to say there's no God. Just look around! The intricacies of this world and how the earth tilts on its axis at a certain degree that if it tilted just a little bit either way we'd either burn up or freeze... it takes more faith to not believe in a creator than it does to believe in one. Because the

odds of all this just "happening" are so preposterous. It's like taking a watch and taking it apart and putting it in a paper bag and shaking it up and all of a sudden, it comes out ticking. It would be far more possible for that than everything else happening in the world. It takes far more faith to not believe in a Creator, to think that it all just happened by chance, than it does to believe in a Creator. So James is saying, even Satan believes in God and only a fool says there is no God; Satan's no fool. But you won't find him in heaven. Because he doesn't really believe.

The word "believe" in Greek is the word *estevo*, it means "trust in, cling to, rely on, adhere to, sell out to," it's a commitment. It's more than just head knowledge. I believe in George Washington. I've never seen a photograph of him, because there weren't photographs in that day, so I really can't prove that George Washington existed, I can't prove it and neither can you. But I believe in George Washington. I'm not a Washingtonian. But I believe in Christ and I am a Christian. Why? Because I have committed my life to Him. I have chosen to follow Him. There are a lot of people who are going to miss heaven by 18 inches, because they've got it up here, in their head, but they don't have it here, in their heart.

They've got a head knowledge. They know it, "Sure, I believe, yeah, yeah!" But you don't see it in their life. They say, "Well, I'm Catholic." Fantastic! "I'm Jewish," Great! "I'm Baptist." Fine. "I'm Lutheran." "I'm Presbyterian." Okay! Listen, there's no verse in the Bible that says, "Religion is the way to heaven." Because it's not. Jesus did not say, "I've come so that you might have religion." Or rules, or regulations, or rituals. He said, "I've come that you might have life." It's a relationship. You may have all kinds of religious background but that's not good enough. Real faith is not just something you believe. It's more than that.

### **5. Real faith is something you do.**

Faith is active. It's not passive. It's a commitment. It's something you can demonstrate. James 2:20 (TLB) *"When will you ever learn that 'believing' is useless without doing what God wants you to? Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith!"* He's saying, how will you know that you've got real faith? You look at your lifestyle and see what kind of actions follow as a result of it. He's saying that if you've got the real stuff, faith can be demonstrated, it can be shown visibly. You say, "How do I visibly show that I have faith?" Well, the first thing you need to do is to be baptized. That's the very first command of Christ. He said, "Go. Make disciples and baptize them." Baptism is publicly identifying yourself. What's happened in my heart, I want to tell the whole world about it. Does baptism make you a Christian? No. Does baptism get you into heaven? No. Does

baptism give you salvation? Not a chance. What's it for? It is the outward symbol of an inward commitment. It's proof. By following His command.

What else do you do? You start following the other commands of Christ. The Bible says that you show your faith by your lifestyle. That faith is proven by how you live. "Actions speak louder than words." That's right. And your behavior shows what you really believe. I'm not saying you've got to work your way into heaven. No. I'm not saying you've got to do good works to be saved. No. Good works are not the root of salvation, they are the fruit of salvation. They don't make you a Christian, they show you are a Christian. They don't deliver salvation; they demonstrate salvation. You do good works not to get it but because you've already got it. Get it? Good.

It's proof. Only by trusting Christ can you be saved. But the proof that you have trusted Christ is shown in your lifestyle. And if there's no proof out there, you have every reason to doubt whether you've ever really tuned in. A good scripture that shows both of these truths together is Ephesians 2:8-10 (TEV) *"For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it. ...in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do."* The basis for your salvation is God's grace. You can't earn it. You don't deserve it. It's just a free gift that you accept. You accept what Christ did for you. The basis of your salvation is God's grace. But the proof of your salvation is your ministry. Do you have a ministry? Yes, you do if you're a believer. What is ministry? Ministry is just a fancy word that means serving God by serving others. That's what ministry is. Serving God by serving other people. The Bible says that you have a ministry if you're a Christian. That you are called to serve. You are saved to serve. It's part of the deal.

I'm saying that if your faith doesn't work, and there's no evidence of it, then it's not real faith. And you need to settle that issue. Maybe you need to say, "I want to settle the issue today. I want to start, not just believing in Christ, but I'm going to follow Him." That's real faith. Now, what are you going to do about it this week? You need to ask God, "What's the next step in my Christian life? What do I need to do next?" Is it baptism, church membership, finding your ministry, helping a Christian Brother or Sister in need, or do you need to tell someone about your faith? What is God calling you to do in your life right now? An Action. That's the proof of faith. That's a "show me" to God. What do you need to do?

Blessings,

Scott

